

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP)

Gliding Scholarship 2025 report

Haayed Aslam



During the summer of 2025, I had the incredible privilege of undertaking a gliding scholarship, generously sponsored by the Air Pilots Trust. This was conducted by Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre (PNGC), alongside a total of seven HCAP students, and a further eight from the Fleet Air Arm Officers Association (FAAOA). We were accommodated at the Army Aviation Centre base, which gave us the opportunity to walk past Apaches and other military helicopters everyday on our way to breakfast!

On the weekend we based ourselves at the nearby Widdle Wallop airfield, home of PNGC. However, due to traffic issues, we had to relocate to Upavon airfield for the remainder of the course, from Monday to Friday. This didn't affect us too much, as the routines stayed the same throughout. Upon arrival each day, we would all muster for a morning briefing, usually delivered by the CFI, Tony World, and our Course Manager, Dave Howell. We were split into syndicates of about four students each. The purpose of this arrangement was to foster our leadership and teamwork skills as we would each be responsible for launching our syndicate's glider and retrieving it upon landing.

Our glider was an ASK 21, and we would always be launched by a winch, except the lucky few who were aerotowed when we shifted airfields on Sunday evening. We were reminded that our launch was akin to that of a Formula 1 car: 0 to 60 knots in about 2.5 seconds. A statistic that I was familiar with, yet nonetheless still impressed by.



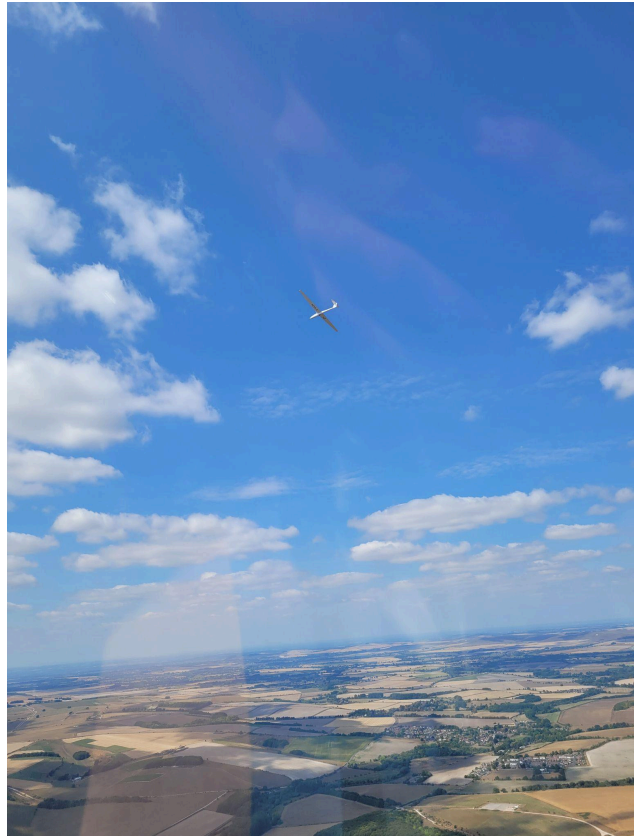
Weather across the week was on the whole clement. Mornings were often chilly, though the worst rain we experienced were a couple of droplets on Wednesday, so we were very fortunate as this maximised our time in the air. I completed a grand total of 26 launches, though flight times varied. Soaring flights often lasted in excess of 40 minutes, but in hazy horizons and huge patches of sinking air we only managed a 5 minute circuit. Towards the end of our training, we practised deliberate launch failures (e.g. winch cable breaks) where we would peak at only a couple hundred feet and would have to either land ahead or fly a shorter modified circuit. These flights lasted just 30 seconds or less!

Besides launch failures, we covered the entirety of a circuit, from the launch to the landing. Additional exercises on stalling and circuit planning were also explored. No spins occurred for anyone, which was a mixed outcome: on the one hand, spinning can get dangerous quickly, but contrariwise it meant we couldn't complete that section of our training! This is primarily due to the K21's inherent inability to spin, which I suppose does more good than harm. We were always briefed by our instructors on the plan for our next flight, and debriefed afterwards too. I appreciated the instructors' patience as we got to grips with the sensitivity of our aircraft. We even went over the theory of how stalls are caused, why the layout of the circuit is the way it is, and how adverse yaw is induced if we bank without applying rudder.

PNGC offered an exclusive bonus for us all: one flight in their Grob 109B motor glider. This was not strictly part of the course, but was a complementary inclusion that allowed us to compare the differences between the Grob and the K21s we were now used to flying several times a day. Another unique feature of the PNGC course was the inclusion of lectures every evening after dinner. These would be delivered by professionals working in civil and military aviation, and served as a chance for us

scholars to network with those in industry and gain insights into various aviation-related careers. As an aspiring commercial airline pilot, I particularly enjoyed the talk from Lee Allinson, a British Airways B777 pilot who also happens to be a PNGC instructor!

Myself and one other fellow syndicate member had completed virtually all of our log book exercises for the course, and we were almost ready for our first solo, a monumental moment for every student pilot. Unfortunately, wind speeds picked up slightly on the last day (and went in the opposite direction to what we experienced the entire week), meaning we had to move to the other end of the airfield. This introduced uncertainty in us, as the circuit layout now looked completely different, with the base leg suddenly feeling further back than what we were used to. As a result, we missed out on the opportunity to go solo. However, to reach this stage is still an impressive achievement, and beyond the intended scope of the course! Perhaps a blessing in disguise, as it allowed us to enjoy two long soaring flights before we wrapped up and went home.



The final day gifted us with sunny weather, the perfect backdrop for the closing ceremony and presentation of certificates. Representatives from FAAOA and HCAP were present, including the HCAP Master, John Denyer. On this day, our families were welcomed to sit in the Grob and tour the K21.

Overall, this scholarship has offered me the facilities to develop several key Pilot Competencies which are vital for success in aviation. In particular, my decision making improved when I constantly had to decide whether to land ahead or fly a circuit during winch failures. My leadership has also been honed by working in a syndicate. I remain forever grateful to HCAP, the Air Pilots Trust, PNGC, and my coursemates for an unforgettable experience!

